

The Call to Macedonia

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The video version is available here: <https://youtu.be/X4nOQ310Yol>

The scripture reading is Acts 15:36-16:34

After Paul and Barnabas' eventful trip to the cities of Galatia, they return to Syrian Antioch for some needed rest and recuperation from their ordeal. Paul himself was nearly killed from stoning, not by the local people, or the pagan Roman population, but by fellow Jews who were bent on stopping Paul and the spread of the Gospel of Messiah. Their anger was not about Paul's message itself, but about the inclusion of the Gentiles, whom they despised and dismissed as unclean reprobates.

It was while at Antioch that Paul wrote his letter to the Galatians, reasoning with them about the justness and Torah basis for Gentile inclusion. But it seemed that there were still many issues and unanswered questions left to address. Paul decided that he needed to return to the region.

Acts 15:36 NKJV 36 Then after some days Paul said to Barnabas, "Let us now go back and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they are doing."

Paul and his traveling companions would not have an easy journey. In many ways this would be an even greater trial. But along with the trials and hardships, came some very important divine appointments.

In the year forty-nine AD, the Jerusalem Council, headed by Peter, James and John, had given their approval to Paul's gospel of Gentile inclusion. But it hadn't been an easy sell in the Diaspora. They had great success in Syrian Antioch, and the community there grew and prospered under Paul's leadership and guidance.

Having built strong leaders in Syrian Antioch, it soon came time for Paul and Barnabas to move on to their next mission. But a dispute arose between Paul and Barnabas over the disciple John Mark.

Acts 15:37-39 NKJV 37 Now Barnabas was determined to take with them John called Mark. 38 But Paul insisted that they should not take with them the one who had departed from them in Pamphylia, and had not gone with them to the work. 39 Then the contention became so sharp that they parted from one another. And so Barnabas took Mark and sailed to Cyprus;

Paul and Barnabas could not resolve their differences over the issue of John Mark's commitment to the mission of the Gospel, resulting in them parting ways for some time to come.

Paul felt the need to return to the assemblies in Galatia to follow up his rather terse and direct letter which he wrote to them while in Antioch. Paul chose a new partner to join him on this return journey with the blessing of the elders.

Acts 15:40-41 NKJV 40 but Paul chose Silas and departed, being commended by the brethren to the grace of God. 41 And he went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.

This entire dispute and subsequent parting of the ways must have weighed heavily on both Paul and Barnabas. They had been through some very serious trials together while preaching the Gospel, and now their friendship seems to have been irreparably broken.

John Mark disappears from the Acts narrative but is later reconciled to Paul and becomes an important assistant, traveling throughout Asia minor as Paul's emissary while Paul himself is imprisoned in Rome. John Mark would later become the writer of the first Gospel, the Gospel of Mark, written somewhere between sixty-five and seventy-five AD.

But what happened to Barnabas? Verse thirty-nine says that he went to Cyprus. There is an apocryphal book titled, "The Acts of Barnabas" which purportedly follows the mission of Barnabas and John Mark to Cyprus and beyond. But it contradicts many of the accounts in the Book of Acts and has been dismissed as a fifth century forgery.

After the parting of ways with Barnabas, Paul chose a Jerusalem apostle by the name of Silas to accompany him on this next journey. This follows the pattern established by Yeshua himself.

Mark 6:7 NKJV 7 And He called the twelve to Himself, and began to send them out two by two, and gave them power over unclean spirits.

Silas was one of the apostles sent from Jerusalem to the assembly in Syrian Antioch to deliver the message from the Council.

Acts 15:22 NKJV 22 Then it pleased the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas, namely, Judas who was also named Barsabas, and Silas, leading men among the brethren.

Silas became an important asset to Paul's gospel. Like Paul, Silas was a Roman citizen. This citizenship status afforded Paul and Silas privileges that most other Jewish men did not experience. Silas was the perfect replacement for Barnabas because he was a gifted speaker and filled with the Holy Spirit.

Paul was quite eager to return to the Galatian assemblies, bringing with him the decree of the Jerusalem Council to settle the matter of Gentile inclusion once and for all. Silas served as a kind of notary for the decree since he was sent directly from the Council. The disciples and Elders of Antioch prayed for Paul and Silas before sending them off on this journey. Others most certainly joined with Paul and Silas as they traveled. Luke himself may have been one of the traveling companions picked up along the way, probably in Troas.

Acts 15:41 indicates that Paul and Silas traveled and stopped off at many new assemblies of believers as they traveled through Syria and Cilicia. They "strengthened the brethren" as they went delivering the decree from the Jerusalem Council.

On their way to Cilicia they would have passed through Tarsus, Paul's hometown. A large city of a half million people with a large Jewish population. Paul speaks of his hometown later in Acts.

Acts 21:39a NKJV 39a But Paul said, "I am a Jew from Tarsus, in Cilicia, a citizen of no mean city;...

Tarsus was a cultural centerpiece for the arts and education in the ancient world rivaling the cities of Alexandria and Athens.

After a brief layover in Tarsus, Paul and his traveling companions arrived in Derby, the furthest city which Paul and Barnabas had traveled in their previous journey some two years prior. There in Derby, they had won many disciples for Messiah Yeshua. Paul and Silas were now able to check up on this community and bring encouragement and follow up on the contents of Paul's letter to the Galatians. It was in Derby where Paul met up with an old friend.

Acts 16:1 NKJV 1 Then he came to Derbe and Lystra. And behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a certain Jewish woman who believed, but his father was Greek.

In Paul's previous journey to Derby, Paul had introduced Timothy and his parents to the Gospel. Timothy was probably a teenager at the time, and we are reminded that Timothy's mother was Jewish, and his Father was a Gentile. Paul was probably quite impressed with the young man Timothy. Paul saw how he had matured in the faith and grown in reputation in the community. Paul wanted to take Timothy along with him on his further journey through Galatia and on to Macedonia.

Acts 16:2-5 NKJV 2 He was well spoken of by the brethren who were at Lystra and Iconium. 3 Paul wanted to have him go on with him. And he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in that region, for they all knew that his father was Greek.

When Timothy was ready to travel, the elders of the community gathered to pray for Timothy and ordain him for the journey ahead. They prophesied over Timothy and predicted that he would become a great proclaimer of the Gospel. Later, when they did part company, Paul wrote to Timothy reminding him of his anointing and special mission from God.

1 Timothy 1:18-19 NKJV 18 This charge I commit to you, son Timothy, according to the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you may wage the good warfare, 19 having faith and a good conscience, which some having rejected, concerning the faith have suffered shipwreck,

In the same letter Paul also wrote:

1 Timothy 4:14 NKJV 14 Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you by prophecy with the laying on of the hands of the eldership.

In understanding Paul in his contemporary context, we see that Paul took Timothy "under his wing" as a disciple in the Jewish tradition just as Paul had been a disciple under Gamliel. Paul often uses "father and son" language when speaking and writing to, or about Timothy.

1 Corinthians 4:14-17 NKJV 14 I do not write these things to shame you, but as my beloved children I warn you. 15 For though you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet you do not have many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel. 16 Therefore I urge you, imitate me. 17 For this reason I have sent Timothy to you, who is my beloved and faithful son in the Lord, who will remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach everywhere in every church.

It appears that as they traveled throughout the region, the traveling entourage picked up some others and left some behind to continue to teach and encourage the believing communities along their way.

Acts 16:4-5 NKJV 4 And as they went through the cities, they delivered to them the decrees to keep, which were determined by the apostles and elders at Jerusalem. 5 So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and increased in number daily.

Paul, Silas, Timothy, and perhaps others continued their journey. They passed through many towns and villages, all the while being led by the Holy Spirit to stop at or to avoid certain places. They eventually came to the coastal seaport of Troas.

Acts 16:6-8 NKJV 6 Now when they had gone through Phrygia and the region of Galatia, they were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia. 7 After they had come to Mysia, they tried to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit did not permit them. 8 So passing by Mysia, they came down to Troas.

Alexandria Troas was a large city on the Aegean coast with an artificial harbor. Troas was a Roman colony with a large population. Luke doesn't record their activities in Troas, but according to their usual pattern, they would have sought out the Jewish community there as well.

Having arrived at Troas, they had now visited all the cities of Galatia that the Holy Spirit led them to go and avoided the cities where the Holy Spirit told them not to go. One night, Paul had a vision from the LORD.

Acts 16:9-10 NKJV 9 And a vision appeared to Paul in the night. A man of Macedonia stood and pleaded with him, saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." 10 Now after he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go to Macedonia, concluding that the Lord had called us to preach the gospel to them.

Paul woke from his dream and knew that he must set sail for Macedonia as soon as it could be arranged. Macedonia was originally the epicenter of an expansive kingdom under Alexander the Great some three hundred fifty years earlier. But was conquered and subjugated by the Romans in the second century BC. Its capitol city at this time was Thessalonica.

It is speculated among Bible scholars that Luke may have been originally from Troas, citing that this is the point in the Book of Acts where Luke's narrative changes to a personal account using personal pronouns to describe their journey and events. Luke may have joined Paul and Silas at this time.

Acts 16:11-13 NKJV 11 Therefore, sailing from Troas, we ran a straight course to Samothrace, and the next day came to Neapolis, 12 and from there to Philippi, which is the foremost city of that part of Macedonia, a colony. And we were staying in that city for some days. 13 And on the Sabbath day we went out of the city to the riverside, where prayer was customarily made; and we sat down and spoke to the women who met there.

Here by the river, Paul and Silas encountered one of their many divine appointments arranged by the Holy Spirit. Paul, Silas, Timothy, and Luke sat down with a group of women by the river where many Jews gathered daily for prayer. They explained their mission and proclaimed the good news of the kingdom of God.

Acts 16:14-15 NKJV 14 Now a certain woman named Lydia heard us. She was a seller of purple from the city of Thyatira, who worshiped God. The Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul. 15 And when she and her household were baptized, she begged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay." So she persuaded us.

Luke's description of Lydia as being a "worshiper of God" indicates that Lydia was a Gentile God-fearer. It appears that Paul and the others spent some time in and around Philippi, and it is here that they run into a particularly serious problem. As they toured the city, proclaiming the Gospel, they were hounded by a demon possessed woman.

Acts 16:16-17 NKJV 16 Now it happened, as we went to prayer, that a certain slave girl possessed with a spirit of divination met us, who brought her masters much profit by fortune-telling. 17 This girl followed Paul and us, and cried out, saying, "These men are the servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation."

Paul became very annoyed with her continuous ranting and interruptions.

Acts 16:18-19 NKJV 18 And this she did for many days. But Paul, greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." And he came out that very

hour. 19 But when her masters saw that their hope of profit was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to the authorities.

The owners of this slave girl were obviously using her and the demon which possessed her for profit as a kind of oracle. They were angry with Paul for casting out the demon and putting a stop to their flow of money. Through this encounter, we can imagine that Philippi was a very rough place. Paul and Silas were brought before the magistrates of the city.

Acts 16:20-24 NKJV 20 And they brought them to the magistrates, and said, "These men, being Jews, exceedingly trouble our city; 21 "and they teach customs which are not lawful for us, being Romans, to receive or observe." 22 Then the multitude rose up together against them; and the magistrates tore off their clothes and commanded them to be beaten with rods. 23 And when they had laid many stripes on them, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to keep them securely. 24 Having received such a charge, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.

Once again Paul, this time along with Silas, is persecuted and tortured for preaching the Gospel and more specifically, for casting out demons in the name of Yeshua! In his last journey, Paul had faced near death by stoning at the hands of fellow Jews. This time, it is the pagans who are bringing the persecution.

It was against Roman law for a Roman citizen to be beaten with rods, yet Paul was to face this three times while taking the Gospel message to the Gentiles. If Paul and Silas had tried to explain that they were Roman citizens, no one listened to them. Later, Paul reflected on this time in Philippi in a letter to the Thessalonians passing on to them lessons learned from the experience.

1 Thessalonians 2:1-4 NKJV 1 For you yourselves know, brethren, that our coming to you was not in vain. 2 But even after we had suffered before and were spitefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we were bold in our God to speak to you the gospel of God in much conflict. 3 For our exhortation did not come from error or uncleanness, nor was it in deceit. 4 But as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, even so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who tests our hearts.

Paul and Silas did not spend their time in prison in anger or self-pity, but they engaged in prayer and singing.

Acts 16:25 NKJV 25 But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them.

The other prisoners probably thought Paul and Silas were crazy! Who in their right mind would be singing and worshipping in such a situation? Their jailer certainly had never heard of anyone singing and praising their God in such conditions as those of Paul and Silas. Then something amazing happened!

Acts 16:25-27 NKJV 25 But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. 26 Suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were loosed. 27 And the keeper of the prison, awaking from sleep and seeing the prison doors open, supposing the prisoners had fled, drew his sword and was about to kill himself.

This was truly an act of God and His angels! The jailer awoke to find all the prison doors open and was prepared to kill himself because he knew his punishment for allowing the prisoners to escape would mean his own torturous death. Paul spoke words of comfort to the Jailer.

Acts 16:28-34 NKJV 28 But Paul called with a loud voice, saying, "Do yourself no harm, for we are all here." 29 Then he called for a light, ran in, and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. 30 And he

brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" 31 So they said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household." 32 Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. 33 And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their stripes. And immediately he and all his family were baptized. 34 Now when he had brought them into his house, he set food before them; and he rejoiced, having believed in God with all his household.

Throughout Paul's entire ministry, time and again, he faced persecution and trials, but he never ceased to praise God through them. By the leading of the Holy Spirit, we also see time and again the power of God to speak to the hearts of those who would otherwise be unreachable through our own efforts and understanding. The great lesson we must take from the life and times of Paul the Apostle, is to never cease praising God in the darkest of times and circumstances.

Study Questions:

1. Traditional Christianity is often at a loss to explain why Paul would have Timothy circumcised given the traditional view that Paul speaks against circumcision and the Torah. Why did Paul circumcise Timothy? How should we interpret Paul's actions and motivations with the circumcision of Timothy?
2. The slave girl or maid servant who followed Paul and Silas all around Philippi seems to have spoken the truth about them (Acts 16:16-18.) How would the average pagan Philippian understand her utterances about Paul and Silas? What is the significance of putting a stop to her by casting out the demon?
3. Discuss the significance of the conversion of the Jailer. The text indicates no hesitation on the part of Paul and Silas to eat the meal prepared for them at the jailer's house. Discuss the reasons and what this might say about the personal life of the jailer.
4. Lydia is one of the few women in scripture who are spoken of without the inclusion of a man; a father, a brother, a husband, or an uncle, etc. What is the significance of this? Why would Paul and the others agree to stay at her house?
5. As far as we know, Paul took on Timothy as his closest disciple. His tutoring of Timothy is patterned after Paul's own discipleship under his Rabbi Gamliel. Yeshua also used this same method of discipleship training with His chosen disciples. Should we apply this same method today? Can this be done in today's world?
6. What new insight did you gain from this teaching? How do you respond to this new insight? How will you realign your life based on this new understanding?

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